

DOLLIE AND THE TWO SMITHS

From Blackwood's (Edinburgh) Magazine.

Besides our agricultural operations, we are called upon as good citizens to devote some of our attention to politics. The election of town officers every year is an occasion of great excitement and intrigue. It is here that the youthful American mind acquires the rudiments of that exalted statesmanship which finds its full fruition in the arduous achievement of great state or national financial grandeur. A "State" in America is divided into counties and towns; the towns are in fact rural districts, each one large enough for half-a-dozen ordinary English country parishes; in each town there may be one or more villages or hamlets, though the villages properly so called require charters of incorporation giving them municipal officers and independent local government. Where there is no such village incorporation, the town chooses annually its own officers; these consist of town supervisor, road commissioner, sheriff, constables, etc. Politics may thus be said to be brought into the minutest details of every man's daily life. For instance, Orange Zee, vowing vengeance against the old man, Dollie's father, and being also animated by the desire to attain the first round of the ladder by which he might possibly ultimately climb to the presidential chair at Washington, determined to put himself forward as the Republican candidate for the exalted office of town constable. In pursuance of which design Orange Zee donned his go-to-meeting coat, and after consulting Swamp, who was going himself to run for Supervisor on the Republican ticket, drove to several of the leading Republican farmers, and announced to them that he had been so urgently pressed by his friends to have his name put upon the ticket as Constable, that he had reluctantly consented, and that he would consider it a favor if they would support him. Meantime Swamp having held a private caucus of his friends at one of the "stores" in the village, decided upon the list of officers which they would offer to the Republican party in opposition to the list headed by the old man, who comes forward as Republican candidate in opposition to Swamp. A few days after all the Republicans in the town rally to the Republican tavern, where Swamp's supporters hand each arrival a ticket containing his own name at the top; and Orange Zee's name at the bottom; and the old man's supporters hand each arrival a list with his name at the top, or receiving which the voters plunge into an inner room reeking with humanity, smoke, and profanity, where all the respective candidates and their supporters are struggling round a table, at which are seated the scrutineers; and, after a day of confusion and excitement, Swamp's supporters announce triumphantly that they have carried their ticket, and Orange Zee returns to our longings arms, covered with dust and glory and smelling of whiskey. But is this a preliminary stage. The Democrats go through the same form a few days afterwards, and then both political parties having thus decided on their tickets, try issues with each other. It is only to be expected that a number of the old man's supporters, disgusted with their defeat, vote Democratic; but then a number of Democrats on the same ground vote Republican—so the one set of malcontents about balance the other. Still the issue is as uncertain as it is England, because a vote in America is worth as much money as it is in England, though it is only for the State or United States. Legislatures that they are worth paying for in money; in their local elections the consideration is various, and may be illustrated by Orange Zee's own proceedings. He having a marvellous faculty for diving into the private affairs of his fellow-townsmen, went to some who had large amounts owing to them, and promised, if they would vote for him, to collect their debts in his capacity of constable, and charge them nothing for it; and he went to others who he knew were overwhelmed with debts, and promised that if they would vote for him he would always give them warning before he came to distraint, so as to enable them to convey their goods away in time; in fact, Orange Zee managed so to impress people with the extent of the powers which he could wield to benefit those who voted for him, and to injure his opponents, that many who voted Democratic secured out the constables nominated on their own ticket, and substituted Orange Zee's name. Thus it happened that although the Democratic ticket was finally elected, and Swamp and the old man both defeated, Orange Zee came in triumphantly at the fall of the Democrats; thus in these early days proving political capacity of a very high order, and inspiring both Dollie and us with great expectations for the future. I did not then know that Orange Zee had begun life as a boot-black in the lobby at Albany, and thus at a tender age had imbibed, as it were, through the soles of eminent politicians, those first principles which he was tutoring to such excellent account. Where life is one gigantic system of barter, one of the earliest lessons to be learnt is, how much one's social position, political influence, professional knowledge, and religious standing, are severally worth "on a trade." Takes the case of George, who was elected Democratic town supervisor against Swamp and the old man; George was a director of the Van Snookville and Bog Hole Branch Railway. The V. S. and B. H. B. R. is Democratic; no Republican conductors, porters, and brakemen need apply. At the State elections the V. S. and B. H. B. R. vote Democratic to a man; and the nomination of the Democratic candidate in our Congressional district may practically be said to rest with the President and Board of the V. S. and B. H. B. R. George had been first a porter, then a conductor and finally had run a wild-cat on said railway with such success that he was promoted to station-master. He run a wild-cat for any length of time on a single line without an accident requires both skill and daring. A wild-cat is a sort of extra goods train that has no stated times for running, but dodges from one station to another between the regular trains whenever the line happens to be vacant, and the engineer thinks he can reach the next station before any train leaves it, and go fast enough not to be overtaken by the lightning express behind him. Metaphorically, George had run a wild-cat on his life; he had a wonderful faculty of dodging past people on his upward career. He knew well the value of his position as station-master, and though his salary was only a thousand dollars a year, he managed by dexterous trading, and powerfully the information, opportunities, and power which his position gave him, for over twenty thousand dollars in two years. George it was who saw how much money was to be made by a hotel at the depot, and he sent for his brother, who was a hotel-keeper, and promised

to secure the privilege of the hotel to him, on condition that he should receive a share of the profits; and so he introduced George junior to the President, who saw no objection to the scheme, provided he had another share in the profits. So the President and the two Georges share the profits of the hotel between them. In the same way he secured a valuable railway contract for the leading Democrat of Van Snookville, upon the understanding that he should command the whole vote whenever he required it, a few refractory Democrats being "squared" with small shares in the contract, and the whole helping to swell the political influence of the President of the V. S. and B. H. B. R., who received besides a large pecuniary share in the profits of the contract. And so George quietly stopped with his twenty thousand dollars from being station-master into the proprietorship of the "Van Snookville Democrat," which paper he worked so successfully for the interest of the railway and the Democratic party in general, and himself in particular, that when the Van Snookville National Bank was started, the votes of public opinion unanimously pointed to George as president; and George finding himself, to use his own words, "reluctantly forced into this position of responsibility and prominence by his appreciative fellow-townsmen" (who are by this time so completely cowed by him, that they are afraid to call their souls their own), runs that flourishing institution, the First National Bank of Van Snookville, as he did the old one, entirely for his own benefit. Is there any wonder, therefore, that though the majority of the population of Van Snookville is Republican, by some mysterious dispensation the vote of the town is always largely Democratic for could not George, who is President of the First National Bank, director of the V. S. and B. H. B. R., town supervisor, proprietor of the "Van Snookville Democrat," part proprietor of the Van Snookville Railway Hotel, and joint owner with his son, who runs it, of the principal store in the village, with one-half of the population in debt to his bank, and the other half dependent in some form or other on the V. S. and B. H. B. R.—could not George, I say, bring such terrific pressure to bear upon any inebriated individual who ventured to thwart his sovereign will, that life in Van Snookville would be a burden to him? If George wants to force a public road across a man's field, all he has to do is to tell the judge, who owes him his election to George's party, that he had better appoint assessors prepared to "lay" the road thus, and do his (George's) will, or he need never more hope to dispose justice in that neighborhood. George's life seems bent on the invention of political and social screws, and instruments of moral torture; and as all the functionaries are elected, and he practically controls the elections, he manages to work the electors and the elected against each other with such a dexterity, that the power he wields may be said to be absolute. Providentially George drinks! Van Snookville, as ungrateful as her rival Paris, to the man to whom she owes it, not her beauty, at least her prosperity—Van Snookville, less bold than her "irreconcilable" sister, is afraid to vote "no" against her oppressor, but finds a grateful solace in the consolatory reflection that he drinks. For a week at a time whiskey reanders George unable to rule over us. Then Swamp, who is perpetual arch-grand knight of the Good Templars, rallies his sons of temperance, and the leading church members enter into deep mysterious conclaves as to the best means of ridding themselves from the hated yoke of George. The old man and Swamp sink their religious and trading animosities to combine against the common enemy; and a holy alliance is formed by the Methodists and Baptists, which results in the nomination of Spurge, the great revivalist preacher, who shortly arrives, to quicken the slumbering consciences of the Van Snookvilleites; and the junior members of the community, of both sects and sexes, look forward with some little flutter of excitement to the prospect of "a protracted meeting," and unlimited opportunities of flutiation. It is hoped that by a tremendous effort of religion and morality George may be crushed. I did not take any part in the revival myself, because Dollie did not approve of it, and she only allowed Orange Zee to go because he said he ought to be there in his capacity of town constable; but his real object was to act as spy upon Swamp and the old man, and report their machinations against George to that accomplished operator and boon-companion, Orange Zee, you see, did not believe that the great George could be crushed, even by a Spurge, although that distinguished divine likened him to a roaring lion seeking whom he could devour, and called upon his hearers to "flee from him and his contracts, and his newspaper, and his hotel, and his store, and all his works." During the fortnight of the protracted meeting, all farming operations were suspended. It took place at a season of the year when work was not pressing, and day after day wagon-loads of old and young of both sexes, in their best costume, drove up alternately to the Methodist and Baptist churches; and the voice of Spurge might be heard for some distance down the village street exhorting his hearers to come forward to "the mourners' bench." Here those who had been most powerfully acted upon made their confession and their profession, and from that time forward they were said to have "got religion." The exact number of persons who "got religion" during this visit of Spurge's was afterwards published among the interesting best-statistics, if I may be allowed the phrase, which are to be found in these spare columns which the religious journals do not devote to abating each other. It is quite an interesting study to turn over a file of these, and add up the total of broken and contrite hearts that have resulted during the year from the labors of the various Spurge all over the country, and to read how bitter these rival Spurges sometimes got with one another, and how jealous of each other's special gifts, and how furious are the feuds which arise from the difficulty of sharing the spoil. Even now the war which resulted from the Van Snookville revival is still raging, for Swamp declared that the old man had persuaded a number of those who intended to "experience" Methodist religion to join the Baptist Church; whereas it had been clearly understood, before Spurge's arrival, that all the broken hearts he made were to be divided equally between the two denominations; but the fact is, on a trade, whether it be in human consciences or anything else, the old man is always more than a match for Swamp. The practical inconvenience of this revival was that its influence was not confined to quickening the consciences only of those who benefited by it; they seemed to get quicker all over. One young man, before he got religion, with whom I was dickering for a horse, positively promised me he had paid 250 dollars for it, and could not sell it to me for

less. Our trade was interrupted by Spurge for a fortnight, and at the end of it he had undergone the quickening process, and was as positively he had paid 250 dollars for the animal. This is only one illustration. I did not know of a single instance of greater honesty in trade after the revival than before it. I never once seemed to occur to two men of contrite spirit to say to each other, "Come now, we have persistently thought everything worth whatever we could get for it, irrespective of its intrinsic value, and have considered false representation in regard to articles we had for sale a merely venial offense; let us, now that we have got religion, never try to get more for anything than it is honestly worth." If even Spurge cannot venture to recommend people when they are asked for their coats to give their cloaks also, without extinguishing himself and his popularity as an importer of the Christian religion forever, let him at least suggest that when a man asks for your coat, you should not turn upon him and strip him naked as an evidence of Christian "sharpness." O my dear Spurge, I am sorry to have to tell you that my experience has been that the sooner men get over the effects of your labors on their consciences, the more I like to deal with them; and I would also venture to suggest that it is very difficult to give to others what you have not got yourself. Orange Zee did not get religion, but he got a good deal of useful information, by the dexterous management of which he hopes to increase his social and political influence, and thus rise to higher spheres of usefulness. I do not mean to divulge what these are—in fact I am at this moment interrupted by a piece of intelligence for which a time will disturb our domestic arrangements, and which involves to no small degree the future happiness both of Orange Zee and myself. I have before alluded to the remarkably philosophical and speculative character of Dollie's mind, and that we have both been conscious that her advanced habits of thought were not unlikely to produce a strong influence upon us. She has just imparted to us the important discovery that she has married the wrong Smith. I need not say that we saw it both in the same light instantly. Why it never flashed upon us before during the last five years it is useless to attempt to inquire. It was the real solution of a great domestic problem, which, like Columbus' egg, we had missed from its extreme simplicity. As the laws of divorce in the State in which we are now residing interfere in the most absurd and arbitrary manner with the private matrimonial arrangements of its citizens, we have determined at once to proceed to the more enlightened State of Indiana, and have telegraphed to have the preliminary measures taken; this will enable us to start to-morrow, Dollie, who has made herself acquainted with the whole course of proceedings, assures us that in that State the ceremony of divorce by mutual consent will not occupy above half an hour, and she then wishes to proceed to New York to have the marriage ceremony performed by at least two leading liberal divines. She is strongly inclined in favor of Mr. Ward Beecher and Mr. Frothingham. She says she does not care so much about the more ceremonial, but she wishes to commit those influential men to a great principle. Orange Zee asked her staidly whether she thought it likely she would ever change back again. Dollie, of course, told him to mind his own business. Orange Zee said he thought it was his business; but his mind is so little able to rise above the ordinary interests of everyday life that we never attend to what he says on these more profound questions. Whether I am the Smith from whom Dollie is going to be divorced, or the Smith to whom she is going to be married, is not a matter of the smallest interest to my readers. I may tell them what happens to us in Indiana and New York, or I may not, on some future occasion; but I can't know till it is over whether it will be worth telling. Meantime, of this the public may rest assured, that Orange Zee, Dollie, and I, all have the strongest possible affection, esteem, and admiration for each other, and are all profoundly indifferent to anything the world may think of us.

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